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Promoting Women's Wellness

June 1995 Issue #4
Newsletter for the McMaster Research Centre for the Promotion of Women's Health (MRCPOWH)

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I UPDATE . . . .

The Research Centre continues to be actively involved in women's health promotion research on campus, in the community, and nationally at conferences. Some of the research projects funded by MRCPOWH have been completed; many are ongoing with the first stage of data collection and analysis. We have continued to keep health promotion a topic for discussion and action in the university and in the community. We hosted an information exchange for the major funded health promotion research projects on campus, and we continue to offer our workshop series at which research results and practical strategies are presented for academics and community.

On the national scene, Health Canada has been restructured with the work of the Health Promotion Directorate being diversified into three different directorates. A letter from Assistant Deputy Minister, Kay Stanley, points out that the restructuring is a proof that health promotion is now fully integrated into the policy and practice of Health Canada. Also on the national scene is the Canadian Public Health Association's *Perspectives on Health Promotion* project whose goal is to build a consensus about health promotion policy for the next twenty years. Look forward to regional consensus-building workshops this year and a national one in June 1996.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank **Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu** for taking on the work of Co-Chair of MRCPOWH from its beginning to July of this year. Her commitment, efficiency, and budgeting knowledge have been essential to the smooth running of the Centre and have been much appreciated by all. Işık will remain with MRCPOWH as a principal investigator and as a member of the steering committee. Margaret Denton has agreed to take on the position of Co-Chair as of July1,1995.

Starting on July 1st, 1995, **Margaret Denton will be a Co-Chair of MRCPOWH** with Mary O'Connor. Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed and Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu will continue as Principal Investigators.

II MRCPOWH WORKSHOP SERIES

All workshops were well attended by faculty, students and community representatives and provided a forum for stimulating discussions. Many thanks to **Faridah Rattani** for her competent help in ensuring effective publicity and public relations.

WORKSHOP #6

Joan Crook and Robin Weir both from the School of Nursing presented ***"Is Gender a Factor in the Experience of Pain, Rehabilitation and Return to Work?"*** (29 Nov. 1994)

Based on the tracking of clients in the McMaster Pain Unit and a series of focus groups, J. Crook and R. Weir analyzed gender as a factor in response to pain. The researchers found that when women and men were injured at work and were afterwards followed during a period of 21 months, men would go back to work earlier, but would soon experience health problems again. Women would take longer to return to work and their recovery would be more complete.

The results of focus groups with women who experienced pain revealed that women do not realize that unpaid work can cause chronic pain, or if they do, they conceal their pain.

Joan and Robin giving a historical perspective noted that women have often been associated with pain and frailty (eg. Eve and labour). It can be argued that psychoanalytic theories of illness have also been used to blame women for their own suffering. Often, women are not believed if the cause of pain is not visible.

They argued that women have internalized the socially constructed paradigm of frailty, particularly when they are financially dependent and because society validates it as feminine. However, they have demonstrated their strength time and again (during the wars, giving birth, living longer). Women should be given the choice to adopt the paradigm of strength and responsibility.

Stressing the difference between wellbeing and illness, the researchers argued that, when there is no cure for chronic pain, every effort should be made to create wellbeing to offset the pain.

WORKSHOP #7

Myrna Pond, School of Nursing, facilitated a practical workshop entitled: **"How to Conduct Focus Groups"** (14 Nov. 1994.) Myrna defined focus group as a group interview that emphasizes interaction among the participants, moderated by a facilitator. The method offers detailed data on the language and images, beliefs and feelings of participants. Discussion focussed on methodological issues including sampling, trial questions, generalizability and ethics. A sample group was conducted to practice looking at opening information and facilitation techniques, using open-ended questions to encourage stories, exploring relevant experiences, and looking for 'the' quote that decides the theme. Examples of individual successes and failures brought emphasis to our exploration of this topic.

WORKSHOP #8

Muriel Westmorland, School of OT/PT and Coordinator, M.H.Sc. Program presented **"Employment Disability Demographics in the Hamilton-Wentworth Area - Implications for Service Providers"** (23 Jan. 1995). Muriel presented the results of a community study conducted by Work-Able Services ad hoc Research Committee and the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. The study shows that more than half of the respondents (845 or 55.9%) were unemployed and had given up looking for a job; 14.9% were unemployed and looking; 7.2% said they would never look. More than half earned less than $10,000, and nearly one third earned between 10 and 20,000 dollars. There is real concern about having to give up benefits when accepting a job. Barriers to training include the lack of money, self confidence, transportation and knowledge on what is available. Many experience discrimination.

What are the implications of this research for service providers? Agencies need to be proactive in focussing on the following issues. People with disabilities are either not in the labour force, or they are in low unskilled positions, the vast majority earning low wages. Education is important, as it is linked to employment and health. The use of information technology (computers, faxes) has improved the possibilities for self employment. Poor transportation and discrimination remain essential problems to resolve. Unfortunately, the present economic situation has worsened the situation.

WORKSHOP #9

Nora Gold, School of Social Work, conducted a workshop on **"Sexism and Antisemitism as Experienced by Jewish Women in Canada"** (20 Feb. 1995). She presented preliminary findings of a work in progress, undertaken at the national level and funded by SSHRC.

Nora Gold organized 6 focus groups of ten women each in Toronto, and 6 in Montreal. She used a feminist qualitative approach, relying greatly on the analysis of personal narratives. Focus groups enhanced women's awareness. Questions were related to the various experiences of sexism and antisemitism. The theme of the body was used as an important catalyst of perceptions and meanings with regard to sexism and antisemitism. Slimness and what women perceived to be the "gentile look" were perceived as desirable for survival in the society.

Women who participated expressed particular distress when they reported antisemitism in feminist movements, antisemitism at work, and different

kinds of exclusion within the Jewish community. Two stereotypes, that of a "Jewish Mother" and "JAP (Jewish American Princess) carry the dual oppression of sexism and antisemitism.

Strategies for resisting these oppressions were suggested: being open about being Jewish, creating a Jewish feminist movement, transforming the larger feminist movement, and fighting ageism.

WORKSHOP #10

Jane Aronson shared her findings on **Invisible Aspects of Home Care Help: "You're not Just in There to do the Work"** (20 March 1995).

In her study of Visiting Homemakers, Jane Aronson interviewed 30 individual homemakers and organized 3 focus groups of supervisors. All were asked what they did in a typical day. The themes that emerged from those encounters are:
-That practical and emotional work cannot be separated. Moreover, Visiting Homemakers often experience sadness and grief as many clients are old and frail.
-Most Visiting Homemakers work beyond the call of duty and rules such as "not to see the client outside of duty" are impossible to apply.
-The blurring of formal/informal relationship is unavoidable. For cultural reasons, it is even more difficult for immigrant women to set boundaries.
-The depersonalizing trend will intensify, as hours are cut back, communication will suffer (a 4 hour client becoming a 3 hour client).
-A great deal of what is done is not named, it is not even called work (a comfort conversation while having a cup of tea). Not named, it may disappear in a time of budgetary constraints.
-Because of the strong moral sense of responsibility involved, there is a potential for exploitation.
Organizers reported that everything is time slotted, and when time for a task is shortened (a ten minute bath), this can border on abuse, making the Visiting Homemakers more vulnerable.

Visiting Homemakers are often unseen, uncredited and unacknowledged because their work takes place in the privacy of a home. In the present trend of dehospitalization, Visiting Homemakers are becoming the backbone of long term care. They offer a more humane and a cheaper approach to care. In the cities, this job is increasingly performed by immigrant women.

Jane's research helps make the invisible visible and respected. We become better aware of the work and needs of Visiting Homemakers.

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HEALTH PROMOTION AND PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH INFORMATION SESSION

On Thursday, March 23, 1995, MRCPOWH organized a Health Promotion and Public Health Research Information Session which took place in the Health Science Centre, McMaster University. This Information Session brought together researchers working on different major projects. Interested individuals also attended and intervened. Presentations were made from the ***Centre for the Study of Children at Risk*** - Dan Offord; the ***Hamilton Wentworth Health Services Organization Mental Health Program*** - Nick Kates and Marilyn Craven; ***Health Reach*** - Rob Stevens; the ***Institute of Environment and Health*** - Martin Taylor, Vice-President (Research); the ***Institute for Work and Health*** - Harry Shannon; the ***McMaster Research Centre for the Promotion of Women's Health*** - Mary O'Connor; the ***Quality of Nursing Worklife Research Unit*** and the ***Teaching Health Unit*** - Jane Underwood of the Department of Pubic Health (on behalf of A. Baumann); the ***Women's Health Office*** - Robin Edwards and Emmi Morwald, Director, ***Research Services***. The objective of the Information Session was to exchange information about projects and centres and to encourage future networking.

There are many important projects presently undertaken in the areas of health promotion and public health at McMaster, often independently from each other. We discovered that we shared more than we knew, be it a similar methodological approach or concerns. Hopefully, more of such exchanges will prove to be useful to all involved.

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OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CLINIC INFORMATION SESSION

On Tuesday, March 28th, **Barry Munn** and **Elisabeth Hannah** from the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc., Hamilton Clinic, met with MRCPOWH's Steering Committee and Research Affiliates to discuss the work conducted

in the Hamilton Clinic so that we could identify our common interests and share information and resources.

There are presently four such clinics in the province, sponsored by the Ontario Federation of Labour and funded by the Workplace Health and Safety Agency. A Board made up of worker representatives (they make up the majority), employers and health professionals oversees its functioning. The health clinic staff has three doctors, two occupational health nurses, two industrial hygienists, one ergonomist, and a support staff person. The clinic is not a treatment centre, but its mandate includes:
*identification of workplace related health problems
*prevention
*education and dissemination of information.

Information about the Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers Inc. is available by telephoning (905) 549-2552.

"Diversity is the principle of women's work and knowledge ... because they work between 'sectors' and because they perform multiple tasks ... too many do too much work of too many kinds."

Vandana Shiva

III PARTICIPATION AT CONFERENCES

Margaret Denton, Barbara Carson and Ingrid Fell will present **"Working in Someone's Home: Challenges and Opportunities"** at the Twelfth Annual McMaster Summer Institute on Gerontology: Theme D: Client-Directed Case Management in the Community, Office of Gerontological Studies, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, June 15, 1995.

Margaret Denton and Karen Barber will present a paper entitled **"Home as the Workplace: Healthy Work Environments for Home Support Workers?"** at the Conference of the Canadian Association of Gerontology, Vancouver, B.C., October 26-29, 1995.

Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Myrna Pond, Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu read a paper at The Third National Conference of the Canadian Council on Multicultural Health, ***"Innovating in Hard Times"***, held in Montreal on May 17-20/95. The paper was entitled: **"Working Together with Immigrant Women in Hamilton on Five Health Promotion Projects Related to Paid and Unpaid Work, at Home and Outside the Home, Using Participatory Action Research. Challenges and Achievements in Hard Times"**.

At the same national conference papers were read by two of MRCPOWH's affiliates: Jocelyn Hezekiah: **"Health Promotion Strategies for Women with Female Genital Mutilation"** and Basanti Majumdar: **"Valuing Diversity: A Collaborative Approach and Cultural Sensitivity Training: A Participatory Approach between health Care and Educational Institutions"**.

On March 29th, Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed was invited to participate as a panelist in a televised research seminar using satellite technology, organized by Joan Feather, co-ordinator of the Prairie Region Health Promotion Research Centre, who also acted as the moderator. Cathy Ellis, a graduate in Community Health and Epidemiology was the conference presenter. The topic was ***"Health Promotion through Popular Theatre: Immigrant Women and Empowerment"***. The teleconference connected four studio audiences with three panelists from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario.

A videotape of the teleconference is now available at MRCPOWH, courtesy of Joan Feather, from The Prairie Region Health Promotion Research Centre.

Mary O'Connor presented **"Les femmes et l'augmentation du travail non-recensé" ("Women and the Increase in Invisible Labour")** at the 6th annual conference of L'Association Latine pour l'Analyse des Systèmes de Santé, Montreal, 25-27 May 1995.

Mary O'Connor presented **"Women and Health: Community Development."** to the Global Community Health Seminar Group for their *Perspectives on Development Series*, McMaster University, 28 March 1995.

Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu presented a paper entitled **"Women's Health and Paid/Unpaid Work"** at the Canadian Industrial Relations Association Annual Meeting, Montreal, May 27-29, 1995.

The Health Canada-sponsored **Second National Workshop on Women and Tobacco** took place in Ottawa February 16-18, 1995. The workshop brought together government, researchers, program planners, and women's organizations from across Canada with the goal of developing priorities and strategies for action on women and tobacco over the next three to five years. Nancy Ross , a graduate student in the Department of Geography whose research is tobacco-related, represented MRCPOWH at the workshop. A need was identified for more research on gender differences in tobacco use and, specifically, to broaden the research focus beyond the individual factors (e.g., peers) to include research that examines larger societal factors that influence tobacco use especially those that heavily affect girls and women. The main products of the workshop are the publication of a document outlining the priorities and the further development of the Canadian Network on Women and Tobacco. Copies of the working documents are available for consultation in the MRCPOWH office.

Jane Underwood (CPHA and Public Health Department) represented MRCPOWH and the other Ontario Health Promotion Research Centres (Centre for Health Promotion, Univ. of Toronto; and Centre for Applied Health Research, Univ. of Waterloo) at the **Canadian Public Health Association Perspectives on Health Promotion Symposium**, held in Ottawa April 10-11, 1995. The purpose of the project is to build consensus on priorities for action in health promotion over the next twenty years, at the national, regional and territorial levels. The process began with a Key Informant Survey in the fall of 1994. The Symposium provided the background for a series of regional consensus-building workshops that will take place this year, followed by a National Workshop at the CPHA meetings in June 1996, and a communication strategy. The Project has produced a discussion paper, "Perspectives in Health Promotion" (March 1995) available for consultation at the Centre, KTH 226A.

"If you want to know a thing, you must change it."

Maria Mies

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

XVth World Conference of the International Union for Health Promotion and Education, Aug. 20-25, 1995, Makuhari Messe, Japan. For more information contact: Secretariat, c/o Kikko Co., Nagata-cho TBR Building 904, 2-10-2 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100, JAPAN. Fax: (81) 3 3593 6173.

U.S./China Joint Conference on Women's Issues, Aug 24-Sept. 2, 1995, Beijing, People's Republic of China.

The Third Interdisciplinary Conference on Occupational Stress and Health, Work, Stress, and Health 1995: Creating Healthier Workplaces, September 13-16, 1995, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Washington, D.C. For more information please contact: Lynn A. Letourneau, Occupational Health Conference, American Psychological Association, Fax (202) 336-6117, Internet: LAL.APA@email.apa.org.

Praxis ♀ Nexus Conference will be held January 18-20, 1996 in Victoria, B.C. For further information contact Pamela Moss, tel: (604) 721-7347 or Fax: (604) 721-6216.

World Congress on Occupational Health and Safety will be held April 22-26, 1996 in Madrid, Spain. For further information contact: Secretaria del XIV Congreso Mundial Sobre Salud Y, Seguridad en El Trabajo, I.N.S.H.T., C/ Torrelaguna, 73, 28027 MADRID (Espana).

The First World Conference on Breast Cancer, June 2-5, 1996, Kingston, Ontario. For further Information contact: World Conference on Breast Cancer, The Ban Righ Centre, 32 Queen's Crescent, KINGSTON ON K7L 3N6.

Teaching to Promote Women's Health, An International Multidisciplinary Conference, Toronto, June 13-15, 1996. For further information Tel: (416) 862-9067 or Fax (416) 862-2238.

IV CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS FUNDED BY MRCPOWH

Healthy Work Environments in Community Based Health and Social Service Agencies

In collaboration with a Steering Committee, **Margaret Denton**, Principal Investigator, **Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu,** Co-Investigator, and **Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed**, Consultant, are working on this project which studies the effect of homecare work on homecare workers' physical and mental health and develop and implement health promotion strategies to enable homecare workers to increase control over, and to improve their health. We focus on the social organization of work and attempt to show that a combination of external, organizational and individual changes will provide healthy work environments. Researchers are working in partnership with **St. Elizabeth Visiting Nursing, Victorian Order of Nurses Hamilton-Wentworth Branch (Hamilton-Wentworth Home Care Program, VON Visiting Nursing Program, VON Visiting Volunteer Program) and The Visiting Homemakers Association of Hamilton-Wentworth**. By homecare workers we refer to the team of workers who provide services to client/consumers in their homes. This includes homemakers, nurses, therapists, case managers and volunteers as well as workers who support them in an office environment including co-ordinators, office staff, managers and supervisors.

The Participatory Action Research methodology includes focus groups, mailed questionnaires and in-depth interviews and is guided by a Community Agencies Steering Committee composed of researchers and representatives from the home health care agencies in Hamilton-Wentworth.

Nineteen focus groups were conducted by M. Denton and I. Urla Zeytinoğlu during January and February of 1995. This included three groups of volunteers, four groups of home support workers, one group of therapists, one group of case managers, two mixed groups of visiting staff, one group of managers, three groups of supervisors, one group of office support staff and one group of co-ordinators. This involved 118 participants who volunteered to take part in these focus groups. The focus groups were taped and have been transcribed. Content analysis of these focus groups is currently underway and a report will be prepared during the summer. Those interested in the project can contact: **Margaret Denton**, tel: 525-9140, ext. 23923 e-mail: mdenton@mcmaster.ca.

Karen Barber, Graduate Student, and **Pam Pringle**, Research Assistant, assisted with the focus groups. They will be working as Research Assistants this summer collaborating in the preparation of the study report and/or development of a survey questionnaire.

Immigrant Women/Work and Health

Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Principal Investigator, **Myrna Pond**, Research Assistant, and **Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu**, Collaborator, are working on five different projects funded by MRCPOWH.

The Advisory Committee on Immigrant Women, Work and Health organized a potluck dinner for all five action/research groups on March 21st. The interaction between women at this evening resulted in new initiatives, such as the opening of a school of crafts in Spanish for children; and a wider representation of immigrant women on community boards.

The Advisory Committee of the Immigrant Women Work and Health Action Groups are organizing a **Share and Tell** session on June 14th at the Hamilton District Health Council, 10 George Street, from 6PM to 9PM. The purpose of the session is to offer an opportunity for organisations which work with immigrant women to share information and resources with each other and with the immigrant women in the community related to their objectives, their activities and their future plans.

The committee has decided to pursue the project of making a video tape on an empowering narrative by an immigrant woman in Hamilton.

The **"Shanti Niketan Action Group"** is continuing its research related to the creation of a Resource Centre for women of Indian origin. The members are also actively involved in the Council of Indo-Canadian Communities, for the purpose of strengthening links with Indo-Canadian communities and with the community of Hamilton at large.

The **"De Mujer a Mujer"** Action Group has been doing research on workshop facilitation, on self

esteem, on parenting. They have accumulated literature and invited experts in those areas, in order to increase their knowledge and receive training which will empower them to conduct workshops for the women in their community. An educational play will be written later in the year. At the same time, they have intensified their links with women in the community and participated in other initiatives.

The "**Women's Worksite ACTION Group**" includes women from a local non-unionized food processing factory who have researched their health and labour concerns with ministry officials, a legal aid advocacy committee, and the appropriate union. Based on this research, they printed and distributed a flyer to the women of the plant. Several changes have developed.

The "**Cultural Interpreter's Women's Group**" includes women from different cultures who have been meeting and establishing a network and information-sharing system about each other's cultures, coping methods, and concerns, especially with respect to promoting their emotional well-being.

Interim reports will be prepared during the summer. Contact person: **Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed**, tel: 525-9140, ext. 23758, ahmedm@mcmaster.ca.

Women with Chronic Physical Disabilities: Women and Multiple Sclerosis.

This project funded by MRCPOWH and Hamilton-Wentworth Home Care brings together twenty-seven women with MS in three separate groups once a week for eight weeks. The objective is to provide the participants with the opportunity: to make contact with other women with multiple sclerosis; to discuss the specific needs of women with MS; to discuss issues about support services and their delivery; to develop recommendations to community support agencies about service delivery; to encourage independence in planning and directing their demands for support; to make plans for changes that could be implemented by the group or by individuals; and to develop support amongst themselves. The project includes two research assistants, **Jacqueline Low and Julia Shelley**, who are facilitating groups, and nine student volunteers. Contact person: **Mary O'Connor,** 525-9140, ext. 23731.

Grassroots Communities Action and Research Program

Grassroots Communities Action and Research Program is a community led initiative funded by MRCPOWH. The group is collecting stories from women in the Hamilton Region about the relation between work and health. Stories of unhealthy working conditions and ones about group initiatives to change work environments are being collected. Stories may be written, spoken in a taped interview, and translated. An outreach program to various women's groups and agencies has been undertaken by members of the community advisory group. One community member, **Marcela Krautter**, has been hired to help co-ordinate the project and to undertake a significant part of the outreach work. The collection of the stories will be submitted to a publisher. Contact person: **Mary O'Connor**, 525-9140, ext. 23731.

Positive Work Environments for Women with Disabilities

A Steering Committee consisting of community partners and faculty affiliates of MRCPOWH have been developing this project over the past year. The objective of this multi-phase project is to identify the components that constitute a "positive work environment" for persons with disabilities and how this environment might be achieved within organizations in the local community. The Faculty Investigators are: **Vera Chouinard**, Dept. of Geography; **Margaret Denton**, Dept. of Gerontology/Sociology; **Muriel Westmorland**, School of OT/PT, Health Sciences; and **Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu**, Human Resources/Labour Relations, School of Business and Women's Studies. **Cathy Charles**, Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis, Health Sciences, is consultant to the project. **Pam Pringle**, Human Resources/Labour Relations, School of Business, is Research Assistant to the project. The Community Partners are from four organizations, **Work-Able, Path Employment Services, United Disabled Consumers and the Hamilton Automobile Club**. This research has received funding from MRCPOWH and from the McMaster Arts Research Board.

During the latter half of 1994 a literature review was prepared and distributed to the Community partners for their comments. This has subsequently been

revised and published as MRCPOWH Working Paper Series #3. During December 1994 and January 1995 the Steering Committee met to refine the goals and research objectives for this initial phase of the project and to develop focus group questions. A number of focus groups were held during March and early April 1995 with persons with disabilities who were either currently working in a paid job, unpaid job, or volunteering. The focus groups were moderated by Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu, Muriel Westmorland and Pam Pringle. Analysis is now taking place on the information gained through these sessions to clarify issues that will be taken into the second phase of this project for further indepth research. A draft report of this analysis will be completed in the summer. It is the hope of the Steering Committee that from this report will flow some specific recommendations that the community agencies can begin to implement. Policy implications and employer awareness of these issues will be a focus of the second phase. In the next year, preparation and distribution of a questionnaire to a wide range of employers and employees in the local community is planned. The goal of that survey will be to assess current practices and perceptions with regard to employment of persons with disabilities. Those interested in the project can contact: **Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu**, telephone 525-9140 ext. 23957, e-mail: zeytino@mcmaster.ca.

A Consumer-Designed Program to Address the Needs of Mothers who Access the Family Law System: Community Consultation Phase I

The impetus for this project conducted by **Jane Aronson**, School of Social Work, and **Karen Bridgman-Acker**, community researcher, comes from the Mothers Family Law Advocacy Project, a group formed by mothers, for mothers in Hamilton-Wentworth to, ultimately, develop a service for women which will provide support, advocacy, information and referral around issues of child custody, support, access and visitation. A community consultation process aimed at exploring mothers' experiences, concerns and needs in relation to the Family Law System has been implemented over the last three months.

Thus far, nine focus groups have been held: seven with women either currently in the Family Law system or with past experience of it; and two with service providers, mostly shelter workers. Karen has facilitated all these groups, always with a member of the project steering committee as a co-leader or recorder. In the months ahead, the data collected in this process will be analyzed and a report prepared.

Since the project began, there has been considerable local media coverage of women's struggles with the Family Law system. It has called attention to the barriers that women face in protecting their own and their children's health and security, and has mentioned this MRCPOWH-funded project (e.g. Hamilton Spectator, March 9). As a result, Karen has received calls from a number of concerned women. Their comments, recorded in detail and with permission, will be a valuable addition to the perspectives of the fifty women who have taken part in the focus groups. They also underscore the urgency and significance of the issues. Those interested in the project can contact **Jane Aronson**, tel : 525-9140 ext. 23789.

Health Experiences and Indicators among Black Female Sole Parents in Hamilton-Wentworth

Patricia Daenzer, School of Social Work, is conducting this project. The health seminars are underway. Three speakers to date have focussed on (1) Parental management of pre-teen health and sexual education; (2) Women's reproductive systems maintenance; (3) Understanding the relationships between life changes and health changes in women's lives. The pre-seminar survey has been administered. Since some women did not attend early seminars, they complete the survey as they join the meetings and working sessions. A post-seminar survey will also be administered. Seminars are ongoing. A complete list of topics is available. Those interested in the project can contact: **Pat Daenzer**, tel: 525-9140 ext. 23790.

Work, Stress & Health: A Study of Female Social Workers at Three Children's Aid Societies

Nora Gold, School of Social Work, has completed the data collection for this project, which explores the relationship between the health problems of social workers working in the field of child welfare, the type of work they do and the organizational characteristics of the agencies where they work. Six focus groups have been conducted so far with

the social workers at the Hamilton-Wentworth CAS and the Catholic CAS, and focus groups at the Brant CAS will be starting shortly. Nora will soon meet with the participants of the focus groups to share the results and discuss what they can do to alleviate some of the work-related stress they talked about in the discussions. Those interested in the project can contact **Nora Gold**, tel: 525-9140 ext. 23791.

Health Promotion Strategies for Women who have Undergone Female Genital Mutilation

Phase 1 of a 3-phase project is currently underway conducted by **Jocelyn Hezekiah**, School of Nursing. Information sessions have been conducted by the Principal Investigator with women from two communities. Two focus groups of Ethiopian women have met twice for 1-3 hours each session. Group size ranged from 5-7 women. A third focus group of 11 Somali women met once for 2 hours. The Principal Investigator and two of the co-investigators have acted as facilitators. These focus groups and individual interviews are expected to meet over a period of 10 to 12 months. Consent form agreeing to participate in the project was obtained from all participants at the first focus group meeting and open-ended questioning was used as a guide to initiate discussion. The data, with the prior permission of the women, were tape recorded. Some preliminary analysis has begun and a few themes are evolving.

Management of Family & Workplace Stress Experienced by Women of Various Cultural Backgrounds

Funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health, Women's Health Bureau and MRCPOWH, this project began in October 1994 under the leadership of co-investigators **Basanti Majumdar**, School of Nursing and **Shelina Ladak**, Research Assistant with the Department of Medicine.

The scope of the study is to use an active/participatory research approach to assist women of various cultures who are in low paying occupations to improve their management of family and workplace stress.

The participating ethnocultural communities include women of Arabic, Black, Hispanic, Indian, Laotian, Muslim and Native Canadian origin. Individuals from these communities were trained using the "Train the Trainer" process in order to facilitate focus groups in a culturally-sensitive manner. A total of 14 facilitators received the 12 hour training program.

By the end of April 1995 the focus groups which completed their participation in the study included the Ismaili, Arabic, Black and Laotian women's groups, with a total participation of approximately 60 individuals. Each group came together to discuss the types of stressors which they experience in an attempt to balance home and work demands, and methods for coping with that stress. Given the participatory nature of the small groups sessions, the research will be actual and not assumed or hypothesized. All focus groups are expected to be completed by July 1995, after which data analysis will begin. For further information please call **Basanti Majumdar** at (905) 525-9140 ext. 22726.

A Health Promotion Project with Immigrant Women Survivors of Torture

Myrna Pond, School of Nursing, and **Minoo Faragheh**, Community Researcher, through informal contacts and letters to organizations of immigrant women, have involved a small group of survivors of torture. They have met as a group in a home setting, and have enjoyed connections and created links through gatherings such as the Immigrant Women, Work and Health pot luck supper. A spirit of trust and participation which is essential for the success of this work is beginning to form in these meetings. The discussions/decision process has started to evolve into the action stage, through planning of speakers, sharing knowledge of resources and/or offering stories of struggle and coping. For further information please call **Myrna Pond** at (905) 525-9140, ext. 23316.

Young Mothers Social Support Study

The study conducted by **Christine Walsh**, School of Social Work, is a qualitative investigation of the experience of early motherhood and the social supports available to a group of high risk young mothers. The study is being done in part as a requirement for the Masters of Social Work in the School of Social Work. Dr. Ralph Brown, of the School of Social Work and Dr. Mark Sanford, Dept. of Psychiatry serve as advisors to the project.

A group of 65 female adolescents were followed for five years to determine if they had a pregnancy during their adolescence. All women were provided data about their fertility situation. A preliminary analysis of personal and familial factors that existed prior to the pregnancy - which showed differences between the young mothers and the young women who had not experienced pregnancy was conducted and presented at the Annual Research Day in Psychiatry.

Eleven young mothers participated in individual interviews. Individual interviews have been transcribed and entered in a computerized database for further analysis. A group workshop was conducted in which women participants decided to engage in an action component primarily directed at education and reduction of the social stigma associated with young motherhood. Presentations were given to: Social Policy graduate course, School of Social Work; Chedoke Child and Family Centre Rounds; Women's Health Office, Lunchtime Seminars; and the Centre for Studies of Children at Risk Centre Staff Meetings.

Internal research papers have been written on the project. A summary of the project is being prepared for submission for the Master's of Social Work.

V COMPLETED RESEARCH PROJECTS

Women, Body Image and Food: Community Based Initiative

This research project conducted by **Gina Dimitropoulos** utilized a socialist feminist perspective to explicate and analyze the way in which women's material conditions influence their understanding of their bodies. This paper postulates that fat oppression and contemporary notions of feminine beauty mask the systemic causes of our dissatisfaction and preoccupation with bodies and food. Due to restricted social, political and economic power, women attempt to gain power by controlling their bodies and by regulating their caloric intake. Preoccupation with the body and food, however, prevents us from identifying the cultural practices and social systems and institutions which maintain and legitimize our subjugation.

A feminist prevention programme is recommended. The primary purpose of this programme is to provide young women with an opportunity to reclaim their voice, their bodily integrity and their right to nurture themselves. This programme proposes to challenge the root causes of eating problems, rather than merely changing women's attitudes and perceptions of their bodies and food. The study is available for consultation at the office of MRCPOWH, KTH 226A.

Supporting a Lesbian with Breast Cancer: Weaving Care Outside 'Family'

This paper focusses on an instance of informal support among a group of women in Hamilton who responded to one woman's breast cancer diagnosis. Themes which emerged from interviews with five lesbians who are part of the support network have been linked to issues in the feminist literature on caring: obligation, disentitlement, indebtedness, and the 'burden' of care. The way that we have managed to name, reframe and resist some of the more coercive and uncomfortable aspects of informal care are highlighted.

Set in the context of policy debates about the balance of formal and informal care, the paper considers both the promise of such support networks, and introduces cautions about the use to which they might be put in a political climate which seeks to reduce government responsibility and offer 'solutions' to social problems at the expense of women. The study is available for consultation at the office of MRCPOWH, KTH 226A.

VI RESEARCH ACTIVITIES OF RESEARCH AFFILIATES

Vera Chouinard has been awarded a $58,000 SSHRC grant to study disabled women's struggles for voice and rights in various branches of the disability movement. Vera is also assisting with a research project sponsored by United Disabled Consumers examining the accessibility and quality of local services for disabled women who are survivors of violence and abuse. She is also involved in a research project which looks at the use of distance communications as a means of facilitating educating and organizing within Canada's disabled community.

Publications of Research Affiliates

* **Vera Chouinard (1994), "Law and Legal Struggles: which ways ahead?"** ***Progress in Human Geography*** **18(4):415-440.**

* **Vera Chouinard and Ali Grant, "On Being Not Even Anywhere Near the Project: Ways of Putting Ourselves in the Picture",** *Antipode* (forthcoming). The paper challenges the substantive and social marginalization of disabled and lesbian women in geography.

* **Marilyn Lee, Jocelyn Hezekiah & Derek Watters** (1995), **"Rural Women and Power in Pakistan".** *Health Care for Women International,* 6(2):125-133.

* **Vivienne Walters, Rhonda Lenton & Marie Mckeary,** ***Women's Health in the Context of Women's Lives*****, Health Canada, 1995.**

VII TRAINING OF GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Inas Ahmed, a demographer, graduated from the Universities of Cairo and Washington, DC. She is presently working as a co-op student in collaboration with Saint Charles School. She is undertaking a study on ethnocultural background, work and health profile of immigrant women in the Hamilton-Wentworth Region. The study assesses the need for collecting data which integrates an ethnocultural perspective.

Gina Dimitropoulos submitted a research project to the School of Social Work entitled **Women, Body Image and Food: Community Based Initiatives.**

Christine Kent submitted a thesis to the Programme in Gerontology entitled **How The Work of Community Nurses Affects Their Health and Safety**.

Elizabeth McDonnell submitted a Thesis to the Programme in Gerontology entitled **Volunteer Workers and The Home Health Care Field**.

Faridah Rattani, public relations assistant, continues to update the Tables of Contents of journals related to women/work and health.

Chris Sinding submitted a research project to the School of Social Work entitled **Supporting a Lesbian with Breast Cancer: Weaving Care Outside 'Family'**.

Karen Barber (Sociology), ***Jacqueline Low*** (Sociology) and ***Julia Shelley*** (English) are working on individual MRCPOWH research projects. See Current Research Projects.

VIII WORKSHOPS PLANNED FOR THE FALL OF 1995

Workshops will be held the ***third Tuesday*** of each month in KTH 705.

Tuesday, September 19th, 1995, **12 to 1:30 pm**, Pat Daenzer (School of Social Work) will facilitate a workshop on **"The Politics of Health Awareness among Black Women"**.

Tuesday, October 24th, 1:00-2:30 pm, Christine Walsh and her co-researchers will share their findings derived from their **"Young Mothers' Social Support Study"**.

Tuesday, November 21st, 1:00-2:30 pm, Julia O'Connor (Sociology) will discuss **"Gender Citizenship and Equality Strategies to Facilitate Women's Participation in the Labour Force"**.

Karen Messing, (Université du Québec à Montréal) will be a Visiting Scholar at McMaster in early February 1996. She is a leading authority in the field of women's occupational health. She will also give a Workshop co-sponsored by Labour Studies and MRCPOWH the week of February 5th 1996.

WE CONNECT .....

Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed continues as a member of the Advisory of the McMaster Health Reach Programme, a collaborative effort between the Centre for Peace Studies and the Centre for International Health focussing on "Children's Health in Zones of Armed Conflict".

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Mary O'Connor is a corresponding member of the Canadian Public Health Association Perspectives on Health Promotion Project. Mary continues as a member of the Evaluation Committee of the Hamilton-Wentworth Community Action Program for Children.

WORKING PAPER SERIES

MRCPOWH working papers are now available at the Centre, KTH 226A, at a cost of $3.00 each. Please make cheque payable to McMaster University.

#1. **"A Theoretical and Methodological Framework for Research on Women, Work and Health"** by Margaret Denton, Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Mary O'Connor, Karen Williams, and Işık Urla Zeytinoğlu.

#2. **"Women and Multiple Sclerosis: Models, Needs and (Support) Services"** by Catherine Hopwood., September 1994.

#3. **"Women with Disabilities and Positive Work Environments: A Literature Review"** by V. Chouinard, M. Denton, M. Westmorland, and I.U. Zeytinoğlu with the assistance of D. Behnke-Cook.

#4. **"Towards Indigenous Notions of Women's Empowerment in India"** by Karen Trollope will be available shortly.

DO YOU WANT . . . . .

To receive the Centre Newsletter, ***"PROMOTING WOMEN'S WELLNESS"*** or information about centre workshops? To receive more information about becoming a community affiliate? To discuss your research with Centre researchers to see what resources or support the Centre might have to offer? To publicize your community research on women, work and health in "Promoting Women's Wellness"? To publish your research in the Working Paper Series of the Centre? Please contact Ann Greene (905) 525-9140 ext. 23554 or e-mail: mrcpowh@mcmaster.ca.

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EDITOR of PROMOTING WOMEN'S WELLNESS **Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed**, with the collaboration of **Ann Greene**.